

Pastor T.C. Arnold
10th Sunday after Trinity
Luke 19:41-48
August 8th, 2010

It might seem like the wrong time of year to talk about Jesus' Triumphal Entry. However, that is where we are in the Gospel text appointed for today. Jesus was riding on a donkey, descending from the Mt. of Olives, and entering the Holy City not long before His crucifixion. We are told of a particular "emotion" Jesus expressed as He got closer to the city. The text says He wept over the city. Why did He weep? You probably can imagine why. He was not weeping for Himself, for He knew what must be done. Rather, Jesus could see all the sins of His people and the city's coming destruction. It caused Him to be very sad – it caused Him to weep.

There is another emotion that Jesus experienced in the text today. This one may surprise some, but it really shouldn't. When Jesus finally entered into Jerusalem and approached the Temple, He got angry. He saw the money-changers in the Temple courts and started to turn over their tables while saying, "*My house shall be a house of prayer, but you have made it a den of robbers.*" Why was Jesus angry at the money-changers? Just like when Jesus wept for His people, when He could see their sins and the city's future destruction, He could also see the dishonest work of those exchanging currency and selling animal sacrifices for gain at the expense of pilgrims that could not afford the high interest rates. This caused Him to be angry. However, I want you to realize that it was necessary for the money-changers to be at the Temple.

Since there had been pilgrimages to Jerusalem for the Passover, there have been money changers in the Temple. It was necessary for them to be there. Did Jesus expect to see them there? The answer would be, without a doubt. Every Jew over nineteen years of age must pay a Temple tax. It was necessary that all should pay that tax so that the Temple sacrifices and the Temple ritual might be carried out day by day. The tax was equivalent to almost two days' wages. It wasn't cheap. The tax had to be paid in the proper currency. Because there were all kinds of valid currencies brought to Jerusalem during the time of the Passover, there had to be those who would "change currency" for the sake of paying the Temple tax (outside currencies were considered unclean). To do so with "some gain" for the money changer was to be expected and was not unethical. But the extremely high rate of exchange they were charging that day was unethical.

What enraged Jesus was that the pilgrims to the Passover could ill afford it. They were being fleeced at an exorbitant rate by the money-changers. It was a shameless social injustice and, what was worse, it was being done in the name of religion.

We know this to be one of the reasons why Jesus was so mad that day. People were taking advantage of people – especially ones that came from far away places and had no choice to change their money or purchase the appropriate sacrificial animal. They were bound by the law to get the right currency and to get the right kind of sacrifice (This was also a problem. They sold, oxen, sheep and doves at a higher price because sacrifices were required at this time as well). We hear of people doing the same today. How many evangelist have you seen on television say you will receive a special reward from the Lord if you give so much money to their ministry cause. They do it in the name of religion.

Now that's the first reason why Jesus acted the way He did. There is still another reason. The Temple, you see, consisted of a series of courts leading into the Temple proper and to the Holy Place. There was first the Court of the Gentiles, then the Court of the Women, then the Court of the Israelites, then the Court of the Priests. Now, all this buying and selling was going on in the Court of the Gentiles. This part of the Temple was the only place Gentiles could come. A Gentile might enter it, but, beyond that, access to him was barred. So then if there was a Gentile whose heart God had touched, he might come to the Court of the Gentiles to think and meditate and pray. For him the Court of the Gentiles was the only place of prayer he knew.

All the racket made by the animals, the coins being exchanged, and the carrying on of those dealing in dishonest ways, was upsetting the Savior. This one place for Gentiles who Jesus would include in His promise of salvation to come – a Holy Place – was made into a market. The one place of reverence and solitude for the Gentile was nothing more than free-for-all – a place of “anything goes.”

What is sacred in your life? Do you ever get upset when someone infringes on those precious traditions that you might have with your family – whatever it is that you consider “holy”? Now let’s turn it around – are we ever the ones who are not keeping God’s sacred things sacred? Some might say that if you are not bowing your head the proper way or if you are sitting when you should be standing or standing when you should be kneeling – you are not keeping God’s sacred things sacred. That’s not what God had a problem with – and we better not have a “holier than thou” attitude over others because we kneel, pray, or give thanks in a certain way. We are never “holier” because of what we do or how we sing or how we carry forth God’s Word in Worship or to the nations. We need to check that attitude.

However, we can do what the money changers did. We can turn what God holds sacred and make it into our good pleasures or our personal gain. It can distract and divert those who are looking for the “sacred things” of Christ. We can be a distraction by what we do, or say, or even by what we don’t do. Keep this in mind as you approach the Lord’s House for worship. Keep this in mind when you have something, “not so flattering” to say to your neighbor that causes your neighbor offense. It’s easy to speak without first thinking – or approaching (such as a sacred space) without reverence.

Keep in mind what Christ did and said in the Court of the Gentiles that day. He was not only angry because of the actions of those who had no respect for His Father’s House, but He was also angry for the sake of those who were there to pray in a sacred place. He was angry at the Jews because His message of life and forgiveness went beyond them – and they didn’t really think so. He was angry because the Jews didn’t care about what the Gentiles were doing there. But Jesus cared – because He was about to go to the cross for them – for all of them (Jew and Gentile). Jesus cared, even though the Jews did not. He cared for the Jews and Gentiles alike, even though the Jews had no idea about what was about to happen with their Savior (whom they didn’t believe) and what He was about to do for them. He cared even though they didn’t.

Beloved in the Lord – care about it. I know you do, but then why don’t we act like it. Act like what Jesus has done and said matters when you are teaching your children and setting an example in the community. Act like it matters what Jesus did to stand up for you by confronting the money-changers even when no one is looking and you are by yourself. Approach life, and your place of worship like it matters what Jesus has done – what He has given – what He suffered for – and what He promises for you for life everlasting.

As compared to many Christians in this world today, we Lutherans approach our Lord, especially in worship, in a unique way. We approach with reverence – not because we “lord” our behavior over other Christians – but because we listen to the counsel of Jesus in the Temple. Jesus comes to our Temple – our place of worship – our hearts and lives – and shuts us up so that we can listen and receive. What is there to receive? So much! God’s grace and work of forgiveness on the cross is what Jesus desires to give to you. He loves to give and He lived to give that to you. It’s okay to sit and listen to and receive without carrying on, being distracted, or shouting at the top of your lungs. We can be quiet in here, so we can use our voices and our actions out there when we go about our week sharing the Good News and inviting our neighbor to be here.

Like Jesus, we at times weep. There are times to weep. Like Jesus, we at times are angry. There are times to be angry. If we feel like doing either today – Our Lord is with us. But right now, hear the message of life in Jesus and know that what He did for you surpasses your weeping or anger. What He did is good for so much more to come for you – life in Heaven through the forgiveness of all of your sins. Take comfort in those times to know, Jesus was all those things – weeping and angry – for you. Amen.

The peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.